

YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS ARE BEYOND

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*For Dad -
You were my dirty **British** coaster with a salt-caked
smoke stack*

(John Masefield - Cargoes)

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It happens when you're not looking. On Friday they are children, by the end of the weekend they are not. Journalists drive in from five counties and through the school gates, arms in vertical salute as they snap picture after picture. You watch the news: kids covered head to foot with pelts of rough hair, bright orange eyes, mouths bristling with pointed teeth. Rather than shying away from the forest of microphones, they run circles around stupid questions. It's as though sprouting fur has given them power over words.

Under your roof, your daughter is first to change. You clap your son on the shoulder and say, "You and me against the world, boy". But his body is a half-inch to the left of where it should be; your hand slips its hold in a way that means he can't join in the necessary laughter. You raise your fist to have another run at it, but he's no longer in the room.

Details come in of an outbreak in Philadelphia. An elementary school in Adelaide. Reports from Khartoum, Brazzaville, Gothenburg, Edinburgh, Minsk, Kyoto. By the end of the week, you lose track.

You hear your son and daughter hissing to each other, behind doors you can't find the key for. Your wife says they're discussing online makeup tutorials. You ask how she can understand that garbage they speak, and the look she gives you prickles with so many sharp

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edges that you have to ask again, and again, until she's not in the room either, and you wonder what's going on in this damn house that no-one except you can stand in the same damn place for more than thirty seconds.

You watch your wife, studying her body for shadows where there should be light. Your questions used to make her agree with you, and quickly. Now, when you ask, she says she's stopped shaving her armpits, her legs. You laugh, and say, "What next?" You watch your son, but it's too late.

These kids make you want to vomit. Not the hair: that could be got rid of with a good fine pair of shears. What's needed are the good fine hands of buddies holding them down while you do just that.

You hate the way they aren't afraid. Kids ought to be afraid, ought to toe your line, no questions dared and flinching when you show them the back of your hand. You were promised fear and you want it back. You need it. What are you supposed to do, now that it's gone? Your wife says, "You could try..." but before she can add some raccoon-like word – *listening* for example – she's disappeared again.

Look at them. Their lack of self-disgust; their tails flicking in a tick-tock of *touch me and I'll take your hand off at the wrist*. How dare they be happy with themselves when they're revolting? You should be the one deciding what makes them happy and what doesn't. It's not normal. It's not right. They make you sick. Not a *Yes sir!* in the whole rat pack. Military service. Now, that would shake them up good and proper. Knock them into shape.

You're no-one's dog and you're not out of tricks, no sir. You check the house, day and night, but somehow, they contrive to be in the room behind you, or the one you have yet to enter. You try

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standing still, but so do they, in a game of musical statues to the tune of your breathing.

You keep the curtains closed. Outside, the world is roaring. You tell yourself it is the wind.